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Citation for published version:

Withers, C 2009, 'Place and the "spatial turn" in geography and in history', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 637-658. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jhi.0.0054>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1353/jhi.0.0054](https://doi.org/10.1353/jhi.0.0054)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

Journal of the History of Ideas

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Place and the “Spatial Turn” in Geography and in History

Charles W. J. Withers

I. INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, British Telecom ran a newspaper advertisement in the British press about the benefits—and consequences—of advances in communications technology. Featuring a remote settlement in the north-west Highlands of Scotland, and with the clear implication that such “out-of-the-way places” were now connected to the wider world (as if they had not been before), the advert proclaimed “Geography is History.” What the advert signalled to as the “end” of geography in the sense of the social gradients associated with space and distance is what is known, variously, as “time-space convergence” and “time-space distancing.”¹ The terms embrace not just the “collapse” of geographical space given technical advances (in travel time and in communications—consequences of what Castells calls “the information age” and “the network society”²), but also the idea that the modern world has become

¹ “Time-Space Convergence” is the decrease in the friction of distance between places, most commonly though changes in travel times: see Donald Janelle, “Global Interdependence and its Consequences,” in *Collapsing Space and Time: Geographic Aspects of Communications and Information*, ed. Stanley D. Brunn and Thomas Leinbach (London: Harper Collins, 1991), 49–81. “Time Space Distancing” is the term proposed by Anthony Giddens to describe the “stretching” of social systems across time and space: Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984).

² Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

more homogenized. One place is now much the same as another. Further, given the likelihood of such technical and cultural changes continuing into the future, geographical distinctiveness, evident in the particularity of place, would be a thing of the past: geography would indeed be history. There is, of course, much evidence to the contrary: that, in the face of “globalisation,” questions of locality, sense of place and of identity in place matter now more than ever. Even, then, as Francis Fukuyama cautioned against the “death” of liberal democratic politics as *The End of History*,³ geography—that is, geography understood as questions to do with place, and questions to do with *where* you are in the world as part of questions about *how* you are and *who* you are in the world—has had considerably heightened significance and for some places and people more than others.⁴

These notions of place—as a particular location, and the character or sense of place—are only part of the meanings associated with place in geographical and in historical work. Like space, its regular epistemic dancing partner in geographical ubiquity and metaphysical imprecision, place is a widespread yet complex term. What follows is historiographical in focus and, of necessity, partial in range. I offer a historiographical survey of the term place, principally but not alone within recent work in geography. In more detail, and with reference to one of the strong senses in which place is used, namely that of locale, “the local,” or localness, I trace here the connections between place, space, and the idea of the local as evident in recent work in history and in geography, especially within the history and the geography of science. Particular attention is paid in this context to the distinctive features of what we may think of as the “spatial turn” in the history of science by looking at the idea of place and space in recent work in Enlightenment studies. My argument is three-fold. Notions of place and space, much debated by geographers, have been as central a concern for intellectual historians and historians of science as for philosophers and others, but they have been differently expressed. There is, I shall argue, value in looking at these different views in order to understand that whilst place is a commonplace term it is not agreed upon: working with imprecision has been both opportunity and restriction. In relation to work within the history of science and in Enlightenment studies, consideration of the so-called “spatial turn,” of place

³ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992).

⁴ On these questions in relation to the current “War on Terror,” see for example Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); Derek Gregory and Allan Pred, eds., *Violent Geographies: Fear, Terror and Political Violence* (London: Routledge, 2007).

as social practice and of placing as a process in accounting for the uneven movement of ideas over space and time may help provide some precision and strengthen connections between geography and history.

II. PLACE (IN GEOGRAPHY): A PARTIAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

Place is one of the most fundamental concepts in human geography. It is also one of the most problematic.⁵ Place, or small-scale regional space, features as a subdivision within the Classical tripartite division of cosmography (the earth in relation to other planetary bodies), geography (the earth as a whole) and chorography (parts of the earth or regional geography). So, too, does the distinction between chorography and chronology as the twin eyes of history with, by convention, chorography being the left eye of history.⁶ As the philosopher of place Edward Casey has shown in his *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (1997), the ideas of place as *chora*, locality, in the work of Plato and of place as a container and of placedness, the *where* of something as a basic metaphysical category in the work of Aristotle are enduring elements in Classical discussions of the topic.⁷ In these terms, the notion of place is long-run, disputed, and in at least one sense in Western intellectual history, central to the very definition of geography and of history.

For political geographer John Agnew, there are three fundamental aspects of place: place as location, place as locale, and the sense of place.⁸ By location is meant the absolute location, the grid references we attach to portions of the earth's surface by conventional latitudinal and longitudinal positioning. By locale, Agnew means the material setting for social relations, the actual morphometry of the environments (domestic, daily, and so

⁵ What follows draws from Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); John Agnew *Place and Politics* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987); John Agnew and James Duncan, eds., *The Power of Place* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990); Nicholas Entrikin, *The Betweenness of Place: Towards a Geography of Modernity* (London: Macmillan, 1991); and Lynn Staeheli, "Place," in *A Companion to Political Geography*, ed. John Agnew, Kathrynne Mitchell and Gerard Toal (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 158–70.

⁶ On these connections, see Robert Mayhew, "Geography, Print Culture and the Renaissance: 'The Road Less Travelled By,'" *History of European Ideas* 27 (2001): 349–69; Robert Mayhew, "Proleptic Locations: Charting the Birth of Modern Geography," *History of European Ideas* 26 (2000): 67–73; Charles W. J. Withers, *Geography, Science and National Identity: Scotland since 1520* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁷ Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), Part One.

⁸ Agnew, *Place and Politics*, *passim*.

on) in which people conduct their lives. Sense of place is taken to embrace the affective attachment that people have to place. These distinctions are helpful as a preliminary modern typology. But since the later 1960s and the 1970s, they have received varying attention within human geography. At the same time as new forms of mathematically-oriented spatial science were being advanced, humanistic geographers turned increasingly to ideas concerning the sense of place. They did so partly as a rejection of the emphasis upon space as a matter of depersonalized power geometry, from distaste for the related law-like generalizations with which geography sought scientific status and from increased attention to place as a lived particularity, and not space as an abstract generality. For humanistic geographers such as Yi-Fu Tuan, Anne Buttimer, David Seamon, and Edward Relph, place was not to be studied as a fractional unit of space but was much more an idea, a concept, a way of "being in the world."⁹

Where Tuan defined place in relation to space: space as an arena for action and movement, place as about stopping, resting, becoming, and becoming involved, Relph emphasized a more experiential notion of place, and drew upon Edmund Husserl's work in phenomenology in doing so. Place in this sense had an almost spiritual dimension, having to do with dwelling, with being in the world. This might be seen as place as "place consciousness" but, for Relph, it was something more:

The basic meaning of place, its essence, does not therefore come from locations, nor from the trivial functions that places serve, nor from the community that occupies it, nor from superficial or mundane experiences. . . . The essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centers of human existence.¹⁰

This is close to the views of Edward Casey, who argues that to live as a human is to live locally, and, further, that to know at all is first of all to

⁹ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1974); Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); Anne Buttimer and David Seamon, eds., *The Human Experience of Space and Place* (London: Croom Helm, 1980); Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976). The idea of "being in the world" is attributable to Martin Heidegger in his *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962).

¹⁰ Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 43.

know the place one is in.¹¹ It echoes too the views of other geographers who see place as different from space and from territory by virtue of the emotional responses inherent in place.¹²

From the later 1980s, geographers concerned with notions of place began to engage with work in social theory and in cultural studies and to consider the connections between place and identity, between place and meaning. In his *In Place/Out of Place*, for example, Timothy Cresswell argued that the description and ascription of people, things, and social practices was strongly linked to particular places: that places and the social practices within them had a strongly normative and moral component. When people acted “out of place,” or did not “know their place,” they had committed a transgression. Place identity came in cultural geography to be a matter of identity politics and differential access to power in given locales. In much of this work, place was understood, as Cresswell later put it, “through the lens of social and cultural conflict. Issues of race, class, gender, sexuality and a host of other social relations were at the center of this analysis.”¹³ Place thus came to be seen not as the locale (and never just the location of given social events) but as the consequence of social processes. Place—and, in parallel, space—was a social construction, produced by social agency as Henri Lefebvre has it.¹⁴ As the Marxist urban geographer David Harvey put it, “Place, in whatever guise, is like space and time, a social construct. This is the baseline proposition from which I start. The only interesting question that can then be asked is: by what social process(es) is place constructed?”¹⁵

At much the same time, however, as Harvey was proposing this social constructivist reading of place, others such as the philosophers Edward Casey and J. E. Malpas and the geographer Robert Sack emphasized a more profound way of thinking about place that saw place as deeper than mean-

¹¹ Edward Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Questions of place also feature significantly in the aesthetic and cartographic construction of landscape in Edward Casey, *Earth-Mapping: Artists Reshaping Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

¹² On this point, see Jan Penrose, “Nations, States and Homelands: Territory and Territoriality in Nationalist Thought,” *Nations and Nationalism* 8 (2002): 277–98.

¹³ Cresswell, *Place*, 29.

¹⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

¹⁵ David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 261.

ing and materiality, something that could not be reduced to the social, the cultural or the natural.¹⁶ For Malpas:

The idea of place encompasses both the idea of the social activities and institutions that are expressed in and through the structure of a particular place (and which can be seen as partially determinative of that place) and the idea of the physical objects and events in the world (along with the associated causal processes) that constrain, and are sometimes constrained by, those social activities and institutions. . . . It is within the structure of place that the very possibility of the social arises.¹⁷

For Cresswell, “Malpas and Sack are arguing that humans cannot construct anything without being first in place, that *place is primary to the construction of meaning and society*. Place is primary because it is the experiential fact of our existence.”¹⁸ For geographers such as Allan Pred, place was central to social meaning not as a fixed spatial “container,” but because it was always in a state of becoming, always the results of historically-contingent processes and social practices.¹⁹

Whether dealt with historically as was the case in Pred’s work, or in a contemporary context as was true of Sack’s work, attention to place as reiterative social practice turned on the reading of place as something struggled over: “Place is the raw material for the creative production of identity rather than an *a priori* label of identity.”²⁰ These creative politicized connections between power and place were what motivated the contributors to John Agnew and James Duncan’s *The Power of Place*. They were particularly apparent in the work of scholars such as Doreen Massey who, in an

¹⁶ J. E. Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); J. E. Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006); Robert Sack, *Place, Consumption and Modernity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) and Robert Sack, *Homo Geographics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

¹⁷ Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 35–36.

¹⁸ Cresswell, *Place*, 32. Original emphasis.

¹⁹ Allan Pred, “Place as Historically Contingent Process: Structuration and the Time-Geography of Becoming Places,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 74 (1984): 279–97.

²⁰ Cresswell, *Place*, 39. As others argue in this context, it is the *relational* connections between people and place that are deemed significant: see, for example, Lewis Holloway and Phil Hubbard, *People and Place: The Extraordinary Geographies of Everyday Life* (Harlow: Pearson, 2001 and, as part of a series concerned with “Re-Materialising Cultural Geography,” Tom Mels, ed., *Reanimating Places: A Geography of Rhythms* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

essay in 1991 and arguing from a Marxist perspective, advocated a new sense of place, a “more progressive sense of place” which would accommodate not only the dislocation felt in consequence of time-space convergence, but also come to terms with the connected networks through which places—any place, all places—are made: “What we need, it seems to me, is a global sense of the local, a global sense of place.”²¹

At the same time, and not just from within geography, place was being considered in terms of what Relph termed the “authenticity” of place, by which he meant the responsibility that existential insiders had to places.²² This was in contrast to what Relph (and Massey and others) considered an increasingly widespread “placelessness” in modern Western society in particular. Everywhere looked the same; from heightened mobility people lost their connection to places; tourism commodified places. Marc Augé thus spoke in 1995 of “non-places”—the ephemeral, sites of transience, the inauthentic.²³

Where, then, does this leave us? For Casey, place is both an enduring trope within Western intellectual history yet something too often displaced by attention to space. Where Agnew in 1987 saw place in terms of location, locale, and a sense of place, Cresswell in 2004 identified three levels through which the idea of place has been approached in geography. The first is the descriptive approach to place, a consequence of “the common-sense idea of the world being a set of places each of which can be studied as a unique and particular entity.” The second, the social constructionist approach to place, is still interested in the particularity of places, “but only as instances of more general underlying social processes.” The third is the phenomenological approach to place. This is concerned less with either the uniqueness of particular places or the relational social processes shaping and shaped by place, and more with questions of human existence as being “in-place.”²⁴ Distinguished less, then, by precise “definitions” and more by

²¹ Doreen Massey, “A Global Sense of Place,” in *Reading Human Geography: The Poetics and Politics of Inquiry*, ed. Trevor Barnes and Derek Gregory (London: Arnold, 1997), 315–23, quote from page 323. Massey’s article appeared originally in *Marxism Today* (June 1991), 24–29. For a further development of this argument, see Doreen Massey and Pat Jess, eds., *A Place in the World? Places, Cultures and Globalization* (Oxford: Open University and Oxford University Press, 1995). Something of these ideas features in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, eds., *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone Press, 1988), especially chapter 12 on “Nomadology” (pages 351–423).

²² Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 82.

²³ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995).

²⁴ Cresswell, *Place*, 51.

approaches or significant discourses, it is clear that place has a history, and not just in geography. What is less clear is how far this attention to place and its different emphases within geography is reflected within history as a discourse and within the humanities and the social sciences more generally.

III. GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY, SOCIAL THEORY, PLACE

For Agnew and Duncan, their 1989 collection *The Power of Place* (subtitled *Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations*) was “an attempt to make the case for the intellectual importance of geographical place in the practice of social science and history.” “It reflects [they continued] the recent revival of interest in a social theory that takes place and space seriously.” There is not the space here to document in detail why and how, as they claimed, “the concept of place has been marginalized within the discourse of modern social science and history,”²⁵ still less to debate the validity of the claim or to explain what they considered to be the principal features of the stated “recent revival,” but some general remarks will have to suffice.

In his own essay, “The devaluation of place in social science,” Agnew argued that the devaluation of place in social science stemmed, in a minor way, from social scientists’ rejection of location-based regional geographical description, and, in more major ways, from the dominance of community and class as explanatory concepts which, individually and in combination, “left little scope for a concept of place.”²⁶ What Agnew called the “enshrinement of the community-society metaphor as a major model of social change in orthodox social science, its ‘naturalization’ as a scientific explanation and ‘nationalization’ as a political explanation” were all responsible for the marginalisation of place.²⁷ At the same time, there was renewed interest in the material constitution of places, in the uneven consequences of globalization. These interests, together with the recognition that notions of class struggle and contested community relations were deeply rooted in place-based exigencies—that politics never “float free” as it were—were invoked as reasons for the revival of interest in place amongst non-geographers.

Looking back upon this argument, it may be that Agnew’s terminology of “devaluation” and “revival” and his explanations for those terms were

²⁵ Agnew and Duncan, *The Power of Place*, 1, 2.

²⁶ John A. Agnew, “The Devaluation of Place in Social Science,” in Agnew and Duncan, *The Power of Place*, 9–29, quote from page 9.

²⁷ Agnew, “The Devaluation of Place in Social Science,” 25.

too strictly delimiting. Certainly, there is evidence that the emergence of the social sciences and the nature of the conceptual categories employed by them, such as class and community, were more attentive to spatial difference and to geographical particularity than he allowed. This would be true, for example, in relation to what Theodore Porter and Mary Poovey have variously termed the “sciences of wealth and economy” in the nineteenth century, namely accountancy, the actuarial sciences, economics, and political economy. These were not only attentive to place and space in their constitution, they also provided a key basis for the state’s surveillance and management of its population in place (towns, parishes, enumeration districts, medical institutions, barracks, schools, households, even rooms and offices).²⁸ The birth of the social sciences and certainly of the natural and biological sciences has, I would contend, been much dependent upon place in terms of location. That has been realized in the second context, for example, in a language of “ecological niche” and “habitat”—and in that sense more than as locale or sense of place.²⁹

History provides further illustrations to refute Agnew’s devaluation/revival model. Historical etymology has disclosed not only changed forms of place names over time, but also contested meanings in the naming of places.³⁰ More especially, and outside the broadly Anglo-American remit of Agnew’s claims, French history, particularly in the *Annales* school, has long been imbued with a sensitivity to place beyond the simply locational. For Fernand Braudel as for Vidal de la Blache and Lucien Febvre before him, geography was not simply a physical stage, mere territory or space, or a set of places upon which the dramas of history were played out. The regional

²⁸ Theodore Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking 1820–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), and his *Trust in Numbers: Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

²⁹ On this point, see several of the essays in Michael Daunt, ed., *The Organisation of Knowledge in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: The British Academy in association with Oxford University Press, 2005), and in David Cahan, ed., *From Natural Philosophy to the Sciences: Writing the History of Nineteenth-Century Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). It is noteworthy in respect of the importance of place in the natural and biological sciences that volume two of Janet Browne’s biography of Darwin recognizes the significance that local place and organisms’ existential fittedness in place had to the development of Darwin’s ideas: Janet Browne, *Charles Darwin: The Power of Place* (London: Pimlico, 2002).

³⁰ I think here of Brir O. E. Ekwall, *Studies on English Place- and Personal Names* (London: Constable, 1931) and idem, *Concise Oxford Dictionary on English Place-Names* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936).

historical syntheses of Braudel and others were predicated upon recognition of place as locale, upon places as connected settings, upon place consciousness as much as they were upon an argument about different time-scales within historical explanation.³¹

But Agnew is correct in noting then a revival of place. Casey in 1997 put it thus:

In and around (and sometimes distinctly athwart) the long shadow cast by Heidegger's imposing work, there are significant signs of a renewed and rising interest in place on the part of philosophically minded authors who think independently of the thinker of Being. The signs are provided by such figures as, in France, Bachelard, Braudel, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari; in Germany, Benjamin and Arendt and M. A. C. Otto; and in North America, Relph, Tuan, Entrikin, Soja, Sack, Berry, Snyder, Stegner, Eisenman, Tschumi, and Walter. Each of these figures has succeeded in fashioning a fresh face for place.³²

As Casey further argues, "Common to all of these rediscoverers of the importance of place is a conviction that place itself is no fixed thing: it has no steadfast essence."³³ It may be, however, that this revival/rediscovery of something without fixed meaning and in so many different contexts is not always what it seems. Is it always place that is being so fashioned? Are they talking of the same thing? In the work of Michel Foucault, to take just one of the above "place revivalists" or "rediscoverers," there is a strong sense in which what is being worked with is space, rather less evidently place. Foucault's attention to spatial history, to the genealogy of space and to heterotopia, and to the idea of space as historically contingent, tends to equate the terms "place," "space," "location," and "site." Foucault certainly saw a spatiality to history; recall his remark that "Geography must necessarily lie at the heart of my concerns."³⁴ Yet it is much less apparent that he ever provided either a genealogy of place, absolute precision in its use or a distinctiveness for it *qua* other terms.

The same might be said for other geographically-aware interventions, in history and in other fields, as has been suggested of Paul Carter, Edward

³¹ On history, geography, and the *Annales* school, see Alan R. H. Baker, *Geography and History: Bridging the Divide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 20–23.

³² Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 286.

³³ Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 286.

³⁴ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), 69.

Said, Clifford Geertz, Anthony Giddens, and, from philosophy, Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre as well as Edward Casey.³⁵ Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay* (1987), subtitled *An Essay in Spatial History*, focuses on the power of naming, on the ways in which through the act and process of place-naming, "space is transformed symbolically into a place, that is, a space with a history."³⁶ Of course, Carter and Edward Said helped establish a strongly post-colonial historical agenda in which notions of place formation, and the rhetorical construction of notions of empire and imperialism, were seen to have had uneven spatial and historical consequences. In their work and in others', place in post-colonial historical writing thus became the focus for different histories of a location. Perhaps more importantly, post-colonial writing became a site for new work on the affective and phenomenal sense of place. This is evident, for example, in work on the politicization of place in terms of rightful dwelling; by what, with reference to Aboriginal places of dwelling and meaning in contemporary Australia, the authors describe as a turn to "the power relations which not only shape meanings of place but also the very way in which we might dwell (or not dwell) in that place."³⁷

Some of these issues were evident in the concern in 1995 of Felix Driver and Raphael Samuel (geographer and historian respectively) to rethink the idea of place. In papers they brought together in *History Workshop Journal* under this heading, their principal focus was with reviving the idea of place as local place within the idea and nature of local history. This was apparent in their hope for a vision of "local history" which "would in some sense de-centre orthodox histories, offering a view of the past which was radically distinct from the view at the centre," and that different questions needed to be asked about the nature of local history given the circumstances of contemporary globalisation. "Put bluntly [they proclaimed] alongside the profoundly uneven development of capitalism, the production of local histories was proceeding at an astonishingly rapid rate; localities were being transformed, abandoned, created, before our very eyes. In such a world, then, what meanings could we attach to 'local history'?"³⁸ Theirs was a

³⁵ David Livingstone, "The Spaces of Knowledge: Contributions Towards a Historical Geography of Science," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13 (1995): 5–34, see especially pages 6–14.

³⁶ Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987).

³⁷ Jackie Huggins, Rita Huggins, and Jane M. Jacobs, "Kooramindanjie: Place and the Postcolonial," *History Workshop Journal* 39 (1995): 165–81, quote from page 166.

³⁸ Felix Driver and Raphael Samuel, "Rethinking the Idea of Place," *History Workshop Journal* 39 (1995): v–vii, quote from page v.

recognition not just of the notion of place as locale but also of the connect-
edness of such locale with the wider world and with the implications of
such connections for a more diverse sort of history altogether:

Can we understand the identity of places in less bounded, more
open-ended ways? Can we write local histories which acknowl-
edge that places are not so much singular points as constellations,
the product of all sorts of social relations which cut across particu-
lar locations in a multiplicity of ways? What ways of telling the
story of places might be appropriate to such a perspective?³⁹

In her paper in this theme issue, Massey returned to this point about
the nature of local places as formed through social relations and connected
with often distant material circumstances: to “the local is always already a
product in part of ‘global’ forces, where global in this context refers not
necessarily to the planetary scale, but to the geographical beyond, the world
beyond the place itself”; and to “the historical accumulation” over time of
such social relations. For her, “The description, definition and identification
of a place is thus always inevitably an intervention not only into geography
but also, at least implicitly, into the (re)telling of the historical constitution
of the present.”⁴⁰

Many of these questions feature in the theme issue of *Rethinking His-
tory*, notably in Philip Ethington’s paper, “Placing the past: ‘groundwork’
for a spatial theory of history,” and in the essays which engage with it.⁴¹
Ethington’s argument that “the past is the set of all places made by human
action” and that historical interpretation is “the act of reading places” is,
at once, a call to historians to engage with the spatial turn in the human
sciences, a reminder of the immutable connections between space and time,
and a preliminary case for the idea and practice of history as cartography:
“Mapping cartography is vital to my proposal to rethink historical inter-
pretation as a form of mapping.”⁴² If, however, it is the case as he asserts
that “Knowledge of the past, therefore, is literally cartographic: a mapping

³⁹ Driver and Samuel, “Rethinking the Idea of Place,” vi.

⁴⁰ Doreen Massey, “Places and their Pasts,” *History Workshop Journal* 39 (1995): 183–
92, quotes from pages 184 and 192.

⁴¹ Philip J. Ethington, “Placing the Past: ‘Groundwork’ for a Spatial Theory of History,”
Rethinking History 11 (2007): 465–93. Five commentaries on Ethington’s paper then
follow, with a reply from him. I am grateful to one of my anonymous referees for drawing
these essays to my attention.

⁴² Ethington, “Placing the Past,” 465, 466, 486.

of the places of history indexed to the coordinates of spacetime,” we may need to recognize that cartography and mapping embrace much more than the ideas of place as location and the-more-than-representational practices of spatial location. Etherington does so in part.⁴³ Further, and with respect to place, his view: “Mapping is the form of interpretation that historians practice. Their hermeneutic operation is intrinsically cartographic, or possibly choreographic, for all life is movement,”⁴⁴ might be modified to “chorographic,” wherein the quality of place, the senses of locale and of belonging intrinsic to place and place identity would be more accurately embraced within his schema. This claim finds support in the remarks of Edward Casey upon Ethington’s paper where he advocates delimiting the idea of mapping to “charting one’s way in a given place or region,” the practice of charting and the idea of the region being essential elements within chorography. He also distinguishes among place-finding, place-taking, and place-making.⁴⁵

It would appear, then, that place is all around us but not consistently agreed upon. For all that Casey in 1997 talked of the rediscovery of place by leading social theorists, it is not clear that place is being worked with in similar ways. There is in common parlance only what I think we may call the common sense metaphysical distinction of place as location, and the more nuanced notion of place as locale.⁴⁶ The first, often read as “site,” is a taken-for-granted feature of most historical and geographical work. The second, less evident, has variations. It is helpful to distinguish between place understood as something produced—place as a product of social interaction (evident, for example, in the work of Allan Pred, David Harvey, Doreen Massey, and Henri Lefebvre)—and place as the facts and social practices of “right” dwelling somewhere. I take “right” here to mean the

⁴³ Etherington, “Placing the Past,” 466. But I think too in this respect, for example, of Christian Jacob, *The Sovereign Map: Theoretical Approaches in Cartography Throughout History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) and, on the place and metaphorical power of mapping in literary studies, of Jeffreys N. Peters, *Mapping Discord: Allegorical Cartography in Early Modern French Writing* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004).

⁴⁴ Etherington, “Placing the Past,” 487.

⁴⁵ Edward S. Casey, “Boundary, Place, and Event in the Spatiality of History,” *Rethinking History* 11 (2007): 507–12. For one discussion of chorography as a form of geographical enquiry and of mapping concerned with the quality of places, see Lesley Cormack, *Charting an Empire: Geography at the English Universities, 1580–1620* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

⁴⁶ It is interesting to note, *contra* Casey’s claims that place has been rediscovered by so many leading figures, that in the forty-six years of its existence, the journal *History and Theory* has never run a theme issue or paid formal attention to the place of place in its reviews of historical writing and methodology (*cf.* *Rethinking History* above).

normative moral codes by which social action in place is deemed appropriate/transgressive and, too, to embrace the propriety of dwelling in place. In these terms, place has a politics through which that propriety is established or uncovered (this theme of the propriety of place in regard to indigenous dwelling and belonging to place is evident in much post-colonial historical writing). But there is also the sense in which place is not simply a location or locale, but a site in wider networks: here, place making embraces the capacity to undertake and disseminate local histories and local geographies in ways which speak, variously, to the recovery of subaltern meaning, to contested place identity and to larger-scale historical and geographical processes as they are realized and constituted in given settings.

IV. PLACE AND THE “SPATIAL TURN” IN THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE AND IN ENLIGHTENMENT STUDIES

It is not immediately apparent that place as it has been outlined above has featured in what has been termed the “spatial turn” in that distinctive form of historical enquiry, the history of science. Yet it is commonly the case that where reference has been at times made to the history of science, to the philosophy of science and more recently to the sociology of science and to science studies, scholars now speak in several ways of the geography, even the historical geography, of science.⁴⁷

For geographer David Livingstone, writing in 1995, attention to science in geographical context was discernible in several ways, each recent:

⁴⁷ In a wide literature on this topic—some of which is cited in what follows—see Adi Ophir and Steven Shapin, “The Place of Knowledge: A Methodological Survey,” *Science in Context* 4 (1991): 3–21; Livingstone, “Spaces of Knowledge”; David Turnbull, “Cartography and Science in Early Modern Europe: Mapping the Construction of Knowledge Spaces,” *Imago Mundi* 46 (1996): 5–24; Steven Shapin, “Placing the View from Nowhere: Historical and Sociological Problems in the Location of Science,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 23 (1998): 5–12; Crosbie Smith and Jon Agar, eds., *Making Space for Science: Territorial Themes in the Making of Knowledge* (London: Macmillan, 1998); Withers, *Geography, Science and National Identity*, 1–28; Charles W. J. Withers, “The Geography of Scientific Knowledge,” in *Göttingen and the Development of the Natural Sciences*, ed. Nicolaas A. Rupke (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2002), 9–18; David Livingstone, *Putting Science in its Place: Geographies of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Diarmid Finnegan, “The Spatial Turn: Geographical Approaches in the History of Science,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 41 (2007): 369–88; Richard Powell, “Geographies of Science: Histories, Localities, Practices, Futures,” *Progress in Human Geography* 31 (2007): 309–30.

Glimmerings of what a geography of scientific knowledge might amount to are thus beginning to be glimpsed, as sociologists and historians of science have begun more explicitly to probe the role of the spatial setting in the production of experimental knowledge, the significance of the uneven distribution of scientific information, the diffusion tracks along which scientific ideas and their associated instrumental gadgetry migrate, the management of laboratory space, the power relations exhibited in the transmission of scientific lore from specialist space to public place, the political geography and social topography of scientific subcultures, and the institutionalisation and policing of the sites in which the reproduction of scientific cultures is effected.⁴⁸

He distinguished three themes in which the geography of science's undertaking was particularly notable: the regionalization of scientific style, the political topography of scientific commitment, and the social space of scientific sites.. Place figured only in the last of these, and did so in the language of "site" and "institutional space." In the same way, place featured as venues for science's making and reception in Livingstone's 2003 *Putting Science in its Place*, subtitled *Geographies of Scientific Knowledge*.

Attention to the sites, venues, and localized places of science, notably of laboratories as places of experiment, may not fully reflect the many notions of place reviewed above, but such work repays examination given this wider context. What Adi Ophir and Steven Shapin in 1991 called "The place of knowledge: the spatial setting and its relations to the production of knowledge" stemmed from rejection of the universalist view of science; whatever it was taken to be, science was everywhere the same, with local circumstances mattering only as "deviations" from this view. Rather, they argued, place understood as local setting *did* matter; indeed it was crucial, since only in local context could one see how far the nature of science was consequential upon the social relations at work there, and not elsewhere, or everywhere else. As has been noted, "With science reconceptualized as a social activity, science studies has directed attention to the uses of scientific knowledge in social institutions such as courts of law, schools, and policy processes such as public inquiries."⁴⁹ The value of knowledge in judicial context, the evidential value of scientists' claims, for example, is thus vitally

⁴⁸ Livingstone, "The Spaces of Knowledge," 16.

⁴⁹ Harry M. Collins and Robert Evans, "The Third Wave of Science Studies: Studies of Expertise and Experience," *Social Studies of Science* 32 (2002): 235–96.

a matter of the place in which science is made, the “truth spot” as Thomas Gieryn has it, be that the laboratory or the witness box.⁵⁰

In studies of laboratory science in particular, the place of experiment has been revealed to be crucial to notions of what scientific knowledge was and to the criteria of credibility that established knowledge as science.⁵¹ The laboratory has been seen as *the* place for the making of modern science in relation to that still-troubled category “The Scientific Revolution.”⁵² It is in most studies that subscribe to a social constructivist reading of science the locus of authoritative claims to know, and study of the local aspects of laboratory truth-making has spawned a range of literature on the ethnographies of practice and particular epistemic cultures in place.⁵³ As Richard Powell has disclosed in the work of the sociologist of science Michael Lynch, such ethnographical approaches to laboratory science require “a revised understanding of what ‘place’ includes. It is all too easy” [notes Lynch] “to assume that laboratory floor plans provide access to the ‘place’ where scientific activity is generated.” Rather, for Lynch, the architecture of the laboratory, a container of practice, are the “surface features of the phenomenal fields investigated by the scientists inhabiting such a ‘place.’”⁵⁴

In thus discussing the place of science, the cognitive claims produced in given sites over *what* science was and *how* and *why* it was and the rela-

⁵⁰ Thomas Gieryn, *Cultural Boundaries of Science: Credibility on the Line* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Thomas Gieryn, “Three Truth Spots,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences* 38 (2002): 113–32.

⁵¹ On this point, see Simon Schaffer and Steven Shapin, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), and Steven Shapin, “The House of Experiment in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Isis* 79 (1988): 373–404.

⁵² On this, see for example Shapin, “The House of Experiment in Seventeenth-Century England”; Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), and the set of essays under the title “Focus: Thoughts on the Scientific Revolution,” in *European Review* 15 (2007): 439–512.

⁵³ Amongst many works, see Jan Golinski, *Making Natural Knowledge: Constructivism and the History of Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Karin Cnorr-Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); Robert E. Kohler, *Landscapes and Labscapes: Exploring the Lab-Field Border in Biology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Michael Lynch, “Laboratory Space and the Technological Complex: An Investigation of Topical Contextures,” *History in Context* 4 (1991): 51–78. For fuller accessible reviews of these matters, see Powell, “Geographies of Science,” 316–20, and Peter Meusburger, “The Nexus of Knowledge and Space,” in *Clashes of Knowledge: Orthodoxies and Heterodoxies in Science and Religion*, eds. P. Meusburger, M. Welker, and E. Wunder (Heidelberg: Springer, 2008).

⁵⁴ Cited in Powell, “Geographies of Science,” 317.

tionships between social relations and epistemological procedures, historians of science have been working, I suggest, with a notion of place both as location and as constitutive locale. The parallels between the social constructivist reading of place in the history of science, perhaps especially in the study of laboratory practice as epistemic places, and the social constructionism of geographers such as Harvey and Massey are noteworthy. There are clear parallels with the words of the philosopher of place J. E. Malpas, cited above, about place encompassing both social activities and physical objects. Yet the focus on place as the site of experimental practice in the history of science and on the epistemological bases to experience do not approximate to the phenomenological perspectives of place in the work of Husserl, Sack, and Relph. I say this recognizing that the emphasis on expertise and tacit knowledge systems within the so-called “third wave of science studies” depends upon recognition of social differences in place, and of the value (and problems) of working with non-accredited systems of knowledge.⁵⁵ This parallels others’ attention to the situated nature of claims to authoritative knowledge and place as “right dwelling” in post-colonial studies, but is unlike that work and certainly unlike Heidegger’s ontological emphasis upon place, in being concerned more with the consequent practices of such expertise than with the locale itself.

The recognition that science is produced in place is hardly novel or metaphysically challenging: things do have to be *somewhere*. The fact that the nature of science is conditioned by place, is *produced through place* as practice rather than simply *in place* is of greater significance. For Shapin, this “localist” or “geographical” turn in science is a matter of moment, a “great accomplishment.” But it is still incomplete: “The problem here is not that the geographical sensibility has been taken too far but that it has not been taken far enough. We need to understand not only how knowledge is made in specific places but also how transactions occur between places.”⁵⁶

Understanding science’s claims to knowledge is thus a matter of understanding its mobility, of travel between places not just epistemic practice in place. These are the central features in Bruno Latour’s work on the stan-

⁵⁵ The first wave of science studies was that prompted by Thomas Kuhn, notably in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) who pointed to the social context to paradigmatic shifts in science. The second wave, which runs from the early 1970s and continues, is social constructivism. The third phase is that of expertise and experience: see Collins and Evans, “The Third Wave of Science Studies,” and Harry Collins and Robert Evans, *Rethinking Expertise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁵⁶ Shapin, “Placing the View from Nowhere,” 6–7.

dardization and replication of science: that the distribution of scientific knowledge across space flows from the success of certain cultures—and, thus, by implication, the success of certain *places*—in creating and applying that knowledge in other places.⁵⁷ Others would reject the Latourian emphasis on metropolitan “centres of calculation,” seeing in non-Western places compelling evidence for the production of legitimate knowledge systems. Taking a non-European view of the history of science, place continues to matter as local sites in their own terms not as “outliers” in global networks.⁵⁸ Here, too, there are connections with post-colonial imperatives in geographical and historical work.

Even so, the point about science’s mobility, its capacity to travel beyond place, remains a matter of moment. For Steven Harris, local place-based work in the history of science presents a too prescriptive heuristic framework:

The “localist thrust” . . . has not only disposed researchers to choose research sites that are spatially and temporally circumscribed, it has also encouraged the selection of scientific practices that were themselves spatially and temporally circumscribed. . . . Thus we would seem to have a grand narrative blind to big sciences and microhistories unacquainted with scientific practices that extended beyond the laboratory, court, or academy.⁵⁹

Harris’s concerns are echoed in James Secord’s remarks about the importance of “knowledge in transit”—with his attendant emphases upon practice, literary replication and conventions of circulation—notably in Secord’s observations about the local place-based nature of studies in the history of science. For Secord, such work has given us “studies of science in a huge variety of places, from clubs and pubs to lecture halls and laboratories and playing fields. . . . It has also tended to legitimate the move toward local specificity, a trend that is seriously at odds with wider trends toward global and comparative history. The result is that we end up with a rich array of research that somehow adds up to less than the sum of its parts.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers in Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

⁵⁸ On this point, see for example Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650–1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁵⁹ Steven Harris, “Long Distance Corporations, Big Sciences and the Geography of Knowledge,” *Configurations* 6 (1998): 269–303, quote from page 297.

⁶⁰ James Secord, “Knowledge in Transit,” *Isis* 95 (2004): 654–72, quote from page 660.

Something of these questions concerning place and space is apparent in recent work in Enlightenment studies. Once historians and philosophers and others debated the “what,” “who,” “when,” and “why” of the Enlightenment—and post-modern critics its “so what.” Attention has now turned to the “where” of the Enlightenment, and even, to talk of Enlightenment and enlightenments, for reasons that have to do with the variant geographical expression and nature of this intellectual movement and moment.⁶¹ This is not wholly a recent move. Significant consideration was given to national variations in the Enlightenment in 1981.⁶² Yet, more recent work has eschewed the nation as the necessary unit of Enlightenment’s geographical exegesis in paying attention to place and space in different ways.

In the Enlightenment’s textual summation in the four-volume *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment* (2003), for instance, two of the four major organizing principles were the political geography (of the Enlightenment) and its agencies and spaces.⁶³ Others have considered place in the Enlightenment to embrace the local sites of collecting and of display, to consider, in other words, epistemic practices in place as the Enlightenment’s local manifestations beneath the nation scale. They see place as a symptom of the Enlightenment’s interest in rationalizing order, “of *placing* as a process of classification.”⁶⁴ The nation as the axiomatic scale through which to review *the* Enlightenment is thus dis-placed, as it were, to be re-placed by attention both to the cosmopolitan or trans-national idea of intellectual exchange across geographical borders *and* by the need to be attentive to the local making and reception of Enlightenment ideas and ideals in place: in societies’ meeting rooms, in laboratories, in the ships of oceanic navigators, in the textual spaces of books and in their translations and different editions, in one place in the field and not in another, and so on. In my *Placing the En-*

⁶¹ I examine these ideas at greater length in my *Placing the Enlightenment: Thinking Geographically About The Age of Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁶² Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, eds., *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). This book was the first in a series of “nation-based” reviews of significant intellectual moments and movements: see, for example, Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, eds., *Romanticism in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, eds., *The Renaissance in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, eds., *The Scientific Revolution in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁶³ Alan Kors et al, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, 4 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁶⁴ Charles W. J. Withers, “Geography, Natural History and the Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment: Putting the World in Place,” *History Workshop Journal* 39 (1995): 137–63, quote from page 139.

lightenment: Thinking Geographically About the Age of Reason (2007), I elaborate upon this argument about the value of considering the located practices of Enlightenment science, in place, and of the mobile nature of geographical and other knowledge in the Enlightenment as it moved between places. Others have embraced a revitalized local history of science in place in the Enlightenment. Alix Cooper demonstrates, for example, how through the textual descriptions and classificatory practices of early modern botanists and natural historians, local flora were revealed, were epistemically made, in and through place.⁶⁵ Looking at such local places for the Enlightenment's making has also helped displace notions of the Enlightenment as necessarily and only European. This is so whether the subject is botanical taxonomy and mapping as a natural science and a commercial and political imperative in the Indian sub-continent, or natural history expeditions in Spanish America which aimed then at collecting information about different places in order to know the realm of nature and the political realm of New Spain and which now, with others' work, have re-vitalised the idea of a Spanish-American Enlightenment as about historical and native identity in place and not as some marginal reflection of a European intellectual core.⁶⁶

That the place of Enlightenment ideas is now central to their meaning and interpretation in the humanities and not just in the history of science is borne out by recent work in book history which has emphasized how the reception of the Enlightenment in, for example, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston has to be understood through the production there of second and later editions of books which were first published in London and in Edinburgh. The Enlightenment as a matter of textual history, an irrefutably central notion in addressing the intellectual history of the Enlightenment, thus becomes a matter of conceiving of a broader geography. One sees the Enlightenment's expression and movement through readers' engagement

⁶⁵ Alix Cooper, *Inventing the Indigenous: Local Knowledge and Natural History in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). In a similar vein, see Lisbet Koerner, "Daedalus Hyperboreus: Baltic Natural History and Mineralogy in the Enlightenment," in *The Sciences in Enlightened Europe*, ed. William Clark, Jan Golinski and Simon Schaffer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 389–422.

⁶⁶ Raj, *Relocating Modern Science*; Leoncio López-Ocón and Antonia Lafuente, "Scientific Traditions and Enlightenment Expeditions in Hispanic America," in *Science in Latin America: A History*, ed. Juan José Saldaña (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 123–50; Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation: Explorations of the History of Science in the Iberian World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Neil Safier, *Measuring the New World: Enlightenment Science and South America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

with print culture to be located precisely in particular places and not in others.⁶⁷ Simply, the Enlightenment was made in different places, meant different things in different places (then and now). Consideration of its place-based dimensions, without losing sight of its cosmopolitan dimensions, is helping throw new light on (the) Enlightenment altogether.⁶⁸

In turning to discuss the notion of space in the eighteenth century, the historian Daniel Brewer began thus: “A glance out across fields of knowledge quickly reveals that ‘space’ became the master metaphor of late twentieth-century epistemology.”⁶⁹ To Brewer, the importance of space rests not alone in the fact that it has become a matter of theoretical speculation in a variety of disciplines, but from the fact that space provides a way to approach the disciplinary and discursive production of knowledge: thinking geographically, if you will, helps turn space into a visible object. Brewer’s concerns were with physical space, social space, colonized space, epistemological space and with aesthetic space: in short, with the material and the metaphorical power of space.

If space has recently been this dominant epistemological metaphor, place has not been far behind. Of course, it may be that the two terms have been used interchangeably for as shown here, neither term, nor the relationship between them, enjoys precise definition. Place is and has long been a commonplace as a metaphysical category. It is more than that in philosophy, history, and in geography. Most often, place is taken to be the location of phenomena, a particular positioning in regard to that other larger epistemological referent, space. Place as locality has a long pedigree in geography and in history. In the form of local history, place has provided an epistemological framework for a particular sort of historical enquiry. For some commentators, such place-based work adds detail to an understanding of various topics—such as the production, mobility, and reception

⁶⁷ Richard Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and Their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland and America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁶⁸ See, for example, the essays in Richard Butterwick, Simon Davies and Gabriel Sánchez Espinosa, eds., *Peripheries of the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2008). I do not mean that “space” is then simply an empty geography over which Enlightenment ideas move unhindered, but that the practices of doing Enlightenment in space are always placed, and that because this is so, we need to be attentive to that locale and to the ways practices made there moved from one place to another, as letters, maps, word-of-mouth exchange, printed books: for a further discussion and one illustration of these matters, see Charles W. J. Withers, “Where was the Atlantic Enlightenment—Questions of Geography,” in *The Atlantic Enlightenment*, eds. Susan Manning and Frank Coglianò (London: Ashgate, 2008), 37–60.

⁶⁹ Daniel Brewer, “Lights in Space,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37 (2004): 171–86.

of science—but does little more unless connections are demonstrated to the extra-local, to beyond place. It is in this sense, I contend, that recent work in the history of science and in Enlightenment studies is paying renewed attention to place *and* to the connections between places, and is, in consequence, dis-placing some long-standing assumptions about core locations and meanings: why were things as they were there? How do ideas and their material “containers” and “shapers” such as books and periodicals, letters and visual depictions move between places?

More materialist conceptions of place as locale within history and geography speak to the constitutive making of place as a consequence not just of emotional attachments in and to a setting, but because of the importance of the lived experiences and embodied practices there, and not somewhere else. The ideas and facts of place-as-contested-space evident in geography in work on the politics of place are, I contend, mirrored in historical work in *Annales* School enquiry and in the ethnographies of laboratory culture in the history of science. They are to the fore, too, in Ethington’s emphasis upon “placing the past” and his attention to history as the interpretative mapping of *topoi*. The phenomenological connotations of the term are the least evident elements in contemporary work on place, at least from the perspective of this historical geographer. That is not to say that the unself-conscious intentionalities that act to define place as profound centers of human existence do not exist, or, in existing, do not matter. The commonality of place as a term is likely to persist. But rather than allow that the term enjoys its currency by virtue of its persistence and seeming imprecision in meaning, we can recognize its different meanings and draw upon them in thinking about the relationships between geography and history and between place, space, and time.⁷⁰

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⁷⁰ I am grateful to the editors of the *JHI*, to the anonymous referees for their helpful and critical comments in revision of this essay, to Warren Breckman for his initial invitation to consider bringing the paper forward, and to the audience at a conference on “Telling the Past Now,” in Aarhus University, November 2007 at which an earlier version was given. My colleagues Emily Brady, Jan Penrose, Jane Jacobs, and Lynn Staeheli were, as ever, supportive critics.